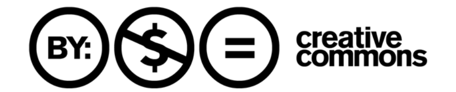


Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée

Mufti, Murabit, Marabout and Mahdi : 4 types in the Islamic history of North Africa

Michael Brett



Résumé
Dans l'histoire du Maghreb musulman, l'attitude des religieux envers l'exercice du pouvoir politique peut se décrire selon quatre categories idéales qui typifient une gamme de positions qui vont de la renonciation absolue à l'acceptation totale de la tâche de gouvernement. A l'époque moderne ces attitudes sont rendues plus équivoques par la disparition des formes traditionnelles du gouvernement, remplacées par l'état moderne. En général les religieux ont accepté ce changement. Parmi les quatre catégories idéales, la personnalité du murdbit prêt à prendre le pouvoir pour 'ordonner le bien et défendre le mal', s'incarne plutôt chez des militaires tels que Boumedienne et Qadhdhafi. Dans Le Livre Vert, Qadhdhafi rend le peuple responsable de l'interprétation de la Loi de l'Islam. Il se peut pourtant qu'il ait maintenant abandonné cette idee et se considère plutôt comme seul interprête valable de la Loi, revêtant ainsi, comme chef du gouvernement, le rôle politique du mahdi.

Abstract
In the history of the Muslim Maghrib, the attitude of the men of religion to the exercise of political power may be explained in terms of four ideal types, mufti, murdbH, marabout and mahdi, which represent a range of positions from complete renunciation to complete acceptance of the duties of the ruler. In modern times the attitude of the men of religion has been complicated by the disappearance of traditional forms of government, and their replacement by the modern state. On the whole the men of religion have not protested. Of the four ideal types the murdbil willing to take power to 'command the right and prohibit the wrong', has been exemplified rather by soldiers, by Boumedienne and by Qadhdhafi. In The Green Book, Qadhdhafi attributes to the people the responsability for interpreting the Law of Islam. It may well be, however, that he has now abandoned this notion in favour of his own authority as leader of the nation to pronounce upon the subject, thus taking upon himself the political role of the final type, the mahdi.

MUFTI, MURABIT, MARABOUT and MAHDI : FOUR TYPES IN THE ISLAMIC HISTORY OF NORTH AFRICA

par Michael BRETT




In what follows I propose to isolate four types of holy man in the Islamic history of North Africa, to determine the historical attitude of the men of religion to the exercise of power, and to suggest the consequences for the state. The types will naturally be ideal, and in many individuals will be found to overlap. They do, however, correspond to historical personalities or groups of people in which the characteristics of one type or another have predominated. Such persons will have specialised more than others in one or two of the many different tasks which North African society has called upon the man of God to perform at different times in different places in town and countryside. But the differences between them have been regularly reinforced by the attribution of particular characters to particular people, so that the historical figures in question have come to illustrate preconceived notions. The four types, therefore, stand out in the sources, and are valuable not only as a guide to the structure of events, but as an indication of the mentality involved in that structure.

Chosen in this way, because they correspond both to actual holy men and to traditional images, the four types, which I shall call muftī, murābit, marabout and mahdī, illustrate the range of attitudes to be found amongst the men of religion in the Maghrib towards the exercise of power. On the one hand they have refused, on the other hand they have been willing to rule the Muslim community. The four types chosen help to show the reasons for their choice, and the circumstances governing their behaviour. A study of this kind is a useful introduction to that of the problem of Islam as a factor in the politics of the contemporary state. Events in Iran show that the man of religion may still have a major part to play in government, and it is important to know the ways in which he may still act in North Africa.

I

Islam centres on a divine Law revealed to man. At least since the 9th century AD, this revelation has been preserved by scholars, handed down from master to pupil in several slightly different versions. The scholar is the ʿālim, the man of wisdom, charged to understand and to expound the Law. He is in contrast to the sulṭān, the man of power, charged to rule by the Law.

The contrast appears in the position of the qāḍī, appointed by the sulṭān to judge in accordance with the Law. Representing the binding force of the Law, he is a great figure – the Qadi of Ifriqiya, Ibn Ghānim, refused to rise in the presence of the Amir Ibrāhim ibn al-Aghlab. As a representative of the sultān, on the other hand, he is necessarily subject to the error inseparable from human decisions and actions. On the news of his appointment as Qadi, the great jurist Saḥnūn declared : To day I am slaughtered without a knife.

The specific duty of judging by the Law gave the qāḍī the kind of power which comes from juridiction, and which was a familiar ingredient of authority in the Middle Ages. He was highly respected and often influential, so that Ibn 'Abbād for example, the Qadi of Seville in the 11th century AD, was able to seize power for himself as the founder of the 'Abbadid dynasty. But on the whole his potentiality in this respect remained undeveloped. He was normally confined by the sulṭān to a strictly limited field of competence. At the same time he took second place to the 'ulamā', the men of wisdom, who continued to regard his office as morally perilous. The most distinguished scholars preferred the position of muftī.

A muftī is one who gives a fatwā, an opinion as to what the Law might be in any particular case. Being no more than an opinion, the fatwā did not compromise the giver, who remained aloof from the affair referred to him for advice. It was the responsability of the recipient to act. On this understanding, the muftī was extensively employed. Muslim rulers and judges regularly consulted the most distinguished authorities on the Law for guidance as to what they should do. Their task was to convert the opinion they received into law with a small 'l', a judgment or decision to be enforced. In Ifriqiya under the Zirids and Hafsids, the practice of consultation became official, and the muftī was formally appointed to advise the qāḍī. Meanwhile ordinary Muslims turned to the muftī for advice as to how they should settle a dispute among themselves.

The great influence of the muftī upon the government of the Muslim community was based in this way upon a firm refusal to accept power, based in its turn upon a high moral repugnance. That influence did not necessarily coincide with the interest of the state. The muftī might give the blessing of Islam to the ruler's policies. He might, on the other hand, oppose the ruler's proposals and activities (without normally approving rebellion). At the same time he might be at the centre of an alternative system of government in which Muslims managed their own affairs with the least possible interference from a state which might be alien (Fatimid, pagan Sudanese, French), non-existent, or like many pre-modern regimes, minimal.

Other men of religion have not refrained from taking command. The murābiṭ, the man of the ribāṭ, took his name from the ribats or garrison forts built especially along the coast in the 8th and 9th centuries AD as protection against the infidel. He combined in varying proportions the character of a holy warrior, a preacher and an ascetic. Zeal for righteousness inclined him to be a man of action, forcing the world to submit to the Law. The most celebrated murābiṭ of this kind is Ibn Yāsīn, the prophetic founder of the Almoravids (al-Murābiṭūn), who probably took their name from ribāṭ in the more abstract sense of banding together in the cause of God. In his effort to command the right and forbid the wrong, Ibn Yāsīn created his own Muslim community, of which he was the judge and the director. (1)

The members of this community, the Lamtūna, he converted in this way into a disciplined army which made war upon pagans and heretics to the north and to the south of the Sahara. Those wars led to the creation of the Almoravid empire, and to the foundation of a state to rule the conquered lands and peoples. Ibn Yāsīn's willingness to compel others to obey the Law made him into a leader who issued orders, passed judgement and took policy decisions which resulted in the establishment of a sulṭa, a government.

The murābiṭ, the type of Ibn Yāsīn, has a long history of militancy. Over the centuries, however, it has been rivalled and to some extent overtaken by a different type with the same name, murābiṭ. To distinguish this type, the third in the series, I shall employ the colloquial version of the term, marabout. The marabout is the holy man of the North African countryside whose function is no longer to change society but to maintain it. Among self-governing tribal peoples, the marabout acts in the manner of a muftī, serving as an arbitrator, governing by advice. The advice carries weight because of the supernatural powers attributed to him. It is accepted because he is unarmed and therefore powerless to side with one party against another. On this basis, his authority has nevertheless developed towards the acquisition of power in two main ways.

The prestige of the marabout has readily attracted disciples, clients and wealth from gifts, including land. It has happened, for example in Morocco in the 17th century AD, that the accumulation of followers and possessions, built up over several generations of marabouts within the same family, gave the holy man more than mere influence. By the middle of that century Muḥammad al-Ḥājj, marabout of the zāwiya of Dilā' in the Middle Atlas, possessed an army, and ruled in central and northern Morocco. Taking advantage of the collapse of the Sa'did dynasty, he had become in effect a sulṭān, a man of power, who might have established a new Moroccan dynasty.

Influence enhanced by clienteles and wealth has been equally important in the face of a foreign enemy. In *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, (2) E.E. Evans-Pritchard gave a classic description of the way in which, under pressure first from the Turks and then from the Italians, the marabouts of the Sanusiyya first represented the tribesmen, then led their armed resistance, until the head of the order became the Amir of Cyrenaica and finally King of Libya. Further west, the shaykh Mā' al-'Aynayn provides a similar example from the Sahara. Having led the resistance of the tribes of northern Mauretania, he supported the so-called Hafīdiya, the successful campaign of Mawlāy Ḥafīẓ to make himself Sultan of Morocco. After the failure of Mawlāy Ḥafīẓ to resist the French, it would seem that the invasion of Morocco by the shaykh's son al-Hayba in 1912 was designed to set a new dynasty on the throne.

For one type of holy man, no shift in character was required to transform him into a man of power. In the Maghrib, if not in orthodox Sunnite theology, the mahdī has been by definition the ruler of the world, sent by God to be supreme in matters of practice as well as matters of faith. Introduced no doubt by the Fatimid Mahdi 'Ubayd Allah, this concept of an Imam who was the earthly authority on the divine revelation, and who in consequence had to be obeyed in everything, was carefully enunciated by Ibn Tūmart, the Mahdi of the Almohads. Since then it has passed into

folklore as the belief in one who shall bring the kingdom of heaven to earth. In accordance with the belief and the prediction, numerous claimants have appeared over the centuries, without anything like the success of the two great prototypes. They have nevertheless kept the belief alive, so that down to the twentieth century there has existed in the mind if not in reality a religious figure characterised by the divine right to rule. It is this claim to the divine right to rule which places the mahdī at the opposite end of the spectrum from the muftī.

Arranged in this order, the four types I have in mind thus illustrate four different attitudes to the taking of power by holy men, ranging from a fundamental unwillingness to an intrinsic requirement. What is interesting is that the element of reluctance has never been entirely absent. It has shown itself, for example, in a strong 'John the Baptist' tradition of preparing the way for someone else. Abū ʽbd Allah, the Fattima dā'ī who created the Fatimid state in Ifriqiya, prepared the way for the Fatimid Mahdi. The Mahdi himself, 'Ubayd Allah, prepared the way for his son, the Qa'im, who seems to have been regarded as the first true Imam. At the end of the life of the dynasty in Egypt, the last Fatimid rulers no longer claimed the rank of Imam, and once again were considered to hold their power in trust for the One who had for the moment withdrawn from the world.

As can be seen from this last instance, the tradition of preparation overlaps a second, closely related tradition, that of delegation, whereby the last Fatimid Imam on earth may be assumed to have committed his power to lesser agents. Ibn Yāsīn, who created the nucleus of a state in the Sahara, gave the military leadership of the Almoravids to the brothers Yaḥyā and Abū Bakr, leaving Abū Bakr to continue the entire work after his death. Ibn Tūmart, the Mahdi of the Almohads, chose 'Abd al-Mu'min to lead the army in his lifetime, and to succeed him as his khalīfa. In the twentieth century Idrīs, when he succeeded to the leadership of the Sanusiyya in 1916, much preferred his religious duties to the role of statesman which he inherited from his brother. When in 1922 events finally forced him to accept the title of Amir of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, he withdrew into exile in Cairo, leaving others to continue the war against the Italians in his name.

Where these two traditions, of preparation and of delegation, do in fact overlap, a third theme is in evidence, that of designation. When the Fatimid Iman Mu'izz li-Dīn Allah left the Maghrib for Egypt, he chose the Zirid amīr Buluggīn ibn Zīrī as his lieutenant in the West in the way that Samuel chose David to be King of Israel, as a youngest son whose destiny was nevertheless apparent to the divinely-guided seer. (3) A similar destiny attends the Almoravid Abū Bakr in Saharan legend, although in this case any mention of the holy man has been lost. (4) In the story of 'Abd al-Mu'min, the creator of the Almohad empire, the holy man reappears, but again with a strictly limited purpose. After an early career marked by signs of future greatness, 'Abd al-Mu'min's designation by Ibn Tūmart is almost the Mahdi's chief function. (5) 'Abd al-Qādir (Abdelkader) likewise fulfilled the portents of his youth. In a particularly striking passage, Charles Henry Churchill describes how the marabout Maḥī al-Dīn, around whom all the forces of resistance to the Turks and to the French in western Algeria had gathered, refused the demand of the people that he become Sultan, and presented to them his son 'Abd al-Qādir instead. (6) There may have been some echo

of this theme when Abdelkrim, in similar circumstances, took the place of his father at the head of the rebellion in the Rif. It is always difficult to tell when an event has been recounted in conformity with a theme or legend, or when it has in fact been enacted in accordance with a prescribed theme. But it may be observed that in these instances the holy man has been invested with power, or with the right to power, simply in order that he may bestow it upon another who is the chief subject of the tale. The result is a form of myth which exploits the ambiguous relationship of the holy man to power to provide a monarch with unambiguous credentials.

The holy man may therefore take power, in principle to ensure that the Muslim community is governed by the Law. At the same time it would appear that he has remained oppressed by the sense of power as a sacred trust which no mortal can properly discharge. This element of reluctance may account for the comparative rarity of the holy man in power. Men of religion have generally been prepared to recognise the right of a ruling dynasty to the throne. Their attempts to take power have usually occurred in moments of crisis, where the state is non-existent, where it has collapsed, or where its power is so tenuous in a particular area that a rival can take root and eventually supplant the existing rulers. Many such attempts have probably been the result of sudden inspiration, perhaps in conscious or unconscious imitation of some well-known example; they have frequently lacked, or lost, credibility, and most have failed, even though the most spectacular failure, that of Abū Yazīd, came well within sight of success. Those that have succeeded, on the other hand, notably the attempts of the Fatimids, the Almoravids and the Almohads, have been major historical events. In what ways can they be said to have affected the principle and the practice of the state in North Africa ?

The holy men in question were not revolutionary in the sense that they changed the kind of monarchy which had grown up in North Africa since the eighth century. Nor were they revolutionary in the sense that they used their power to overthrow the social order. The organisation and discipline of their followers, seen at its most elaborate in the structure of the Almohad community created by Ibn Tūmart, was not employed to transform the entire society of north Africa, but to constitute ruling groups. Their achievement was to continue an existing tradition of state-building, which they extended to include Morocco. In doing so, I suggest, they promoted rather than solved the paradox of power as an activity both sacred and profane. The typical contrast between the ideal and the actual which accounted for the ambivalence in attitude of the men of religion was still in evidence. Means and methods of the kind which filled the jurists with pious horror were used to uphold the symbols of divine justice and order. The state became still more of a theatrical performance in which all manner of devices were employed to produce for all concerned the satisfying effect of government in accordance with the divine command.

II

Modern governments have introduced a whole new range of techniques hitherto unknown to the Law in its traditional interpretations. With the aid of these techniques, their authority and their activities have extended to embrace the whole of society in many new ways for equally novel purposes. These purposes have not always been inspired or justified by Islam in accordance with custom; frequently, indeed, the intention has been anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic. The political circumstances of the holy man have consequently changed. Codification of the Law as it is applied in the courts has severely restricted the scope of the muftī. So has the extension of legislation and official regulation to every aspect of life. By the same token, the means of taking power have greatly changed. The last of the great marabouts bloomed artificially in the exceptional conditions of the Protectorate in Morocco; there is now little scope for a holy man of this type to make himself independent in his own locality. The preaching of the murābiṭ, wherever he is now to be found, and the coming of the mahdī can no longer hope to inspire and organise remote peoples to descend upon the centres of government with any success against a modern army. Political activity must now be co-operative, constitutional, conspiratorial or revolutionary. Islam itself is obliged to contend with rival philosophies. There are, on the other hand, new possibilities. The greater capacity of modern government to plan and organise makes possible a new conception of the Islamic state and of its role in society far wider than before.

The colonial regime in the Maghrib, which established modern government in the region, required the men of religion to make an important choice. The situation was peculiarly relevant, since the regime was constitutionally predicated upon the separation of the various Muslim communities from the immigrant Europeans, and upon the subjection of these communities to European rule. The men of religion were obliged either to accept or reject a state of affairs in which the natural order was overturned, and Muslims were ruled by non-Muslims. In the choice that they made, on the other hand, traditional attitudes of the kind described in the first part of the paper can still be detected. In accordance with the long habit of obedience to the sulṭān, however obnoxious, the great majority chose to accept, (7) on condition that some part at least of the domain traditionally reserved to the Holy Law was left intact. In Morocco, Lyautey was able to win support by the ostentatious respect which he showed to the cult and its practitioners; in Tunisia the so-called Vieux Turbans protested against the disregard of the Law by the authorities in the affair of the Djellaz cemetery and the matter of the private *habous*. By and large, however, the muftī gave a favourable opinion; the marabout complied.

Those who were more actively opposed to the whole principle of the colonial regime were more modern in their approach. They were led by adherents of the Salafiyya, the movement for Islamic reform, which was equally critical of traditional Muslim attitudes. Like the Shaykh Taalbi in Tunisia, they adopted the organisation of the political party to attain their objectives. Like Ben Badis in Algeria, however, they were also preachers, in the pulpit and the press. While their tone was often inflammatory, in the manner of the murābiṭ, their words spoke louder than their actions. Like

others before them, they withdrew from the immediate and the extreme. Taalbi denounced Bourguiba. In Algeria the gradualist approach of Ben Badis to the recovery of a national identity resolved itself into an educational programme, and culminated in a piece of advice. The advice, to purify the heart and mind before taking overt action, was not followed. The year of publication of Malek Bennabi's *Vocation de l'Islam,* in which the spiritual renaissance was put before anything else, was also the year of the Algerian insurrection. The leaders of the insurrection, who placed great emphasis upon the Islamic character of the war, were not professional men of religion. In Morocco the case may seem different. If ʿAllal el-Fassi be counted a man of religion, then he and his associates, working through the technique of a political party, came closest to the leadership of a movement designed to capture power. As the Istiqlal committed itself to the cause of the Sultan, however, so ʿAllal el-Fassi failed to emerge as a candidate for office comparable to Bourguiba. Willingly or not, at independence he made way for the King.

Independence ended the dilemma posed by the colonial regime. The natural order was restored when governments became once again Muslim. No longer obscured by the identification of the state with colonial oppression, however, the basic problem of modernity was revealed, namely the relationship of the modern state to the Law. Not only techniques, capability and purposes have altered out of all recognition, but even the justification of power has changed. The governments of North Africa now claim to represent the people they rule in a way that owes much to democratic theory and little to traditional ideas of the ruler whose responsibility for his subjects was to God. So far as the men of religion are concerned, however, the solution has been traditional, acceptance of the modern state in return for its recognition of a limited part to be played by the Law in government. The codification of legal practice has closely defined the operation of the Law in the courts, leaving little to the discretion of the scholar. But compensation has been provided by a return to the theatrical tradition of the Islamic state, with its emphasis upon the public observance of religious duties. Where there has been conflict in the matter, notably in Tunisia over the observance of Ramadan, the government has compromised. The men of religion have on the whole been content with the situation. The ʿālim has been flattered by state patronage, the muftī has been selectively consulted. The marabout, who already prior to independence may have begun to move into the Neo-Destour, for example, may now be making his way in local and national government on the strength of his local prestige. Little progress seems to have been made towards the basic purpose of the movement for Islamic reform, an interpretation of the Shariʿa to meet all the requirements of modern life. Nor has any religious personality emerged in opposition to seek power for the sake of a more radically Muslim policy. Popular discontent, which might conceivably encourage the appearance of such a person, has given the impression of being more directly concerned with economics.

Instead, the strength of Islam as a political force leading to the capture of power in an independent North Africa has been demonstrated by others, whose religious commitment has been personal rather than professional. Both Boumedienne and Qadhdhafi have been soldiers, obliged to seize power conspiratorially, by the military coup. As men with a self-appointed mission, they have had an inspirational character

which recalls the murābiṭ. Their avowed aim has been to govern in accordance with Islamic principles. At the same time, perhaps in keeping with the tradition of the holy man, both have been peculiarly reticent. Boumedienne lived as a recluse; Qadhdhafi has made a point of living simply and openly, ruling informally. Authority has been attributed in theory to the people.

Qadhdhafi has the distinction of having written a work of political theory to serve as a text for his ideas. (8) For the purpose of this discussion, *The Green Book* is of extraordinary interest. The chapter entitled 'Sharī'at al-Mujtama'' – 'The Law of Society' – takes up the notion, previously elaborated, of the people governing themselves through a series of popular committees, to show the principles behind the laws these committees should establish. (9) These principles are those of a natural law, called significantly sharī'a, based according to the society in question upon religion or tradition; in the Muslim society of Libya this natural law must clearly be the Law of Islam. It must be so, all the more because natural law, wherever it is to be found, is a law of the Islamic type, that is, a law which cannot be made at will by a human legislator, but only understood and interpreted. Those responsible for this understanding and interpretation are the people as a whole.

In this way, Qadhdhafi is opposed to modern government on two counts, firstly because it is conducted not by the people, but by those who claim to speak in the people's name; more fundamentally, because it is based upon man-made laws created and applied by these so-called representatives. But he is equally opposed to the traditional Islamic state with its twin pillars, the muftī to interpret and the sulṭān to enforce the divine Law, and to the attempt of the movement for Islamic reform to devise an up-to-date alternative. In the Muslim North African context in which it was composed, his argument reflects the failure of the wise men of the Salafiyya to rework the centuries-old collective effort of the traditional scholars, and rejects their endeavour to show how the Islamic Law may meet the demands of government in the 20th century. Qadhdhafi proposes a state in which the people will agree upon the ways in which the Law is to be applied for all the purposes of government.

It is a proposal which, in place of democratic theories of popular sovereignty and representative government, would put something approaching the classical Muslim doctrine of ijmā', 'consensus', the agreement of the community upon an existing body of law. As a Muslim theory of Muslim government, it would displace the muftī from the position he has held for a thousand years as the effective spokesman for the umma, the Muslim community, in this matter. Instead it would posit a return to the ideal condition of the early Muslim community, in which ijmā' is held to have been the consensus of all believers, so that the rule of Law was guaranteed by the people as a whole, in accordance with the saying: 'My people will never agree upon an error'. In so far as the world has changed since the days of Muhammad, it will still be for the entire community, working, Qadhdhafi suggests, through a hierarchy of popular committees, to agree upon the ways in which the Law is to be followed in hitherto unheard-of circumstances. In so doing (although Qadhdhafi does not say so in the *Green Book*), Muslims above all others will be able to rest secure in the inspiration of God.

A scheme of this kind affects not only the democratic concept of representative government, and the role of the muftī in traditional Islamic society, but also the whole question of the sulṭān, the (man of) power in the state. Qadhdhafi has himself used force to overthrow a regime of which he disapproved. In the *Green Book* he declares necessary such use of force to overturn a government which does not rule in conformity with his concept of the umma. It will require a strong, bold leader, who consequently occupies an extremely important place in Qadhdhafi's thought. At the same time he admits that a leader of this kind is likely to become a dictator, and hence totally at odds with his vision of a self-governing society whose pyramid of popular assemblies and committees would leave the revolutionary leader no special position. The leader, it seems, must simply relinquish the power he has acquired for the purpose of the revolution, and retire. He must not be replaced in a government which operates by agreement rather than consent or compulsion. Just as the muftī is to disappear, so is the sulṭān.

Qadhdhafi himself is clearly implicated at this point. In the case of Libya, the conclusion must be that the author of the *Green Book* is not only obliged but willing to step down from the high position in which he was placed by the *coup* of 1969. Having attained power, he would now renounce it. In terms of what he has written, there is no contradiction. Both are necessary acts, whose motive is one and the same. This motive appears, in the light of Qadhdhafi's Muslim convictions and the evidently Islamic inspiration of his political thought, as a zeal for righteousness which seems very typical. Qadhdhafi stands outside the ranks of the men of religion. Like the murābiṭ, he has nevertheless been prepared to take charge of the government to create a state in accordance with Islamic principles. Like previous religious leaders, however, he has not seen himself as an essential part of the result, simply as a necessary agent of the process required to bring it about.

Qadhdhafi's problems, on the other hand, are greater than those of any traditional predecessor. With the techniques of the modern state at his disposal, he has the opportunity as well as the ambition to remodel society in a much more radical fashion than was conceivable with the resources at the disposal of the pre-colonial period. At the same time neither he nor the popular assemblies and committees he has endeavoured to create have the knowledge and experience to adapt the Islamic Law for this purpose. Traditional interpretations may no longer serve, but where the scholars of the movement for Islamic reform have so far failed, it is not to be expected that isolated individuals or groups of believers can succeed simply on the strength of their faith. It is not surprising that the most conspicuous achievements of the programme in matters of religion have been still greater emphasis upon the familiar symbols of Islam. Nevertheless Qadhdhafi, in his impatience for results, seems now to have gone beyond the thinking of the *Green Book* to advocate a different approach to the understanding of the Law. In the paper which MM. Bleuchot and Monastiri presented to the Table Ronde, 'L'Islam de M. El-Qaddhafi', they suggested that he had come to regard himself as the imām of Libya, and as such the sole interpreter of Islam to the country.

Qadhdhafi's claim to this position would be closely connected with the appearance of a new slogan : Al-Qur'ān Sharī'at al-Mujtama' – 'the Koran is the Law of

the Society'. This slogan is truly revolutionary, since it implies, as MM. Bleuchot and Monastiri report, the repudiation of the Sunna as a source of the Law and as a guide to its interpretation. In their opinion the intention behind the slogan is polemical, to attack and destroy the traditional authority of the 'ulamā', the custodians *par excellence* of the Sunna, to speak for the Law. As such it might well be thought of as a logical attempt to clear the way for the emergence of the people at large as the sole authority in the matter, while setting aside the mass of traditional interpretation in readiness for something new. But what is striking is that Qadhdhafi, who in the *Green Book* expressly denies the right of any one man or group of individuals to speak for the community of believers on the subject of the Law, appears to have promulgated the doctrine upon his own initiative. With the basis of the Law thus defined by the effective ruler of the country, it is his interpretation which, directly or indirectly, must henceforth prevail.

If Qadhdhafi has indeed put himself forward in this way as the supreme authority in matters of faith, he has taken a bold step. The rights and wrongs of this step in terms of Islamic jurisprudence need not be discussed here. In terms of the argument of this paper, it is more important that the murābiṭ-type figure who brought about the initial revolution, but in his writings assigned to himself no special place in either goverment or legislation, appears to have given way to another. As the Libyan leader apparently assumes an increasingly authoritative role in matters of faith, it may be that the traditional *repertoire* of Islam in the Maghrib is not yet exhausted, and that we are witnessing, in response to the challenge of the modern world, the emergence of a personality much closer to the final type, the mahdī.

The appearance of such a figure, in the form of a modern statesman rather than the mahdī of popular belief, may have been a possibility inherent in the movement for a modern as distinct from a traditional Islam since the nineteenth century. The movement for Islamic reform took its twentieth-century shape at the hands of Muhammad 'Abduh in the colonial period, when power in Egypt was in the hands of the British, and there was no longer the prospect of a Muslim government prepared to make the effort to match modernity to the Law, or the Law to modernity. But prior to the British occupation of Egypt and the French Protectorate in Tunisia, when the future appeared to be in the hands of Muslim rulers, it was to these that Islamic modernists looked for progress. Khayr al-Din in Tunisia hoped to see the technical accomplishments of Europe brought to perfection by association with the Holy Law in a Muslim administration. In office, he enlisted the services of the 'ulamā' for the purpose. (10) He himself was bound by the constraints of the political system to which he belonged, and by which he was eventually frustrated. But with the return of independence, and the installation of Muslim governments in the initial stages of constitutional experiment, the emphasis of a Khayr al-Din upon the necessity for state action to achieve his aims has been forcefully renewed. Given this emphasis, the assumption by a leader of the religious as well as the political authority required to carry out such a programme would certainly be unorthodox, but not entirely eccentric or unexpected.

NOTES

(1) Cf. the account of Al-Bakri, *Description de l'Afrique septentrionale*, ed. and trans. de Slane, Paris, 1965, 165, trans. 313 ff., esp. 169-70, trans. 319-20.

(2) Oxford, 1949.

(3) H.R. Idris, *La Berbérie orientale sous les Zirides*, Paris, 1962, p. 42.

(4) H.T. Norris, *Saharan Myth and Saga*, Oxford, 1972, pp. 108-9.

(5) A. Huici, « La leyenda y la historia en los origines del imperio almohade », *Al-Andalus*, XIV, 2, 1949, pp. 346-8.

(6) Charles Henry Churchill, *The Life of Abd el-Kader*, London, 1867, 23-4; trans. M. Habart, Algiers, 1971, pp. 64-5.

(7) Cf. J. Berque, *L'Intérieur du Maghreb, XV[e]-XIX[e] siècle*, Paris, 1978, pp. 411-19.

(8) Muammar al Qadhafi, *The Green Book*, Arabic and English, Part 1, London, 1976; Part 2, London 1977.

(9) *The Green Book*, part 1, Arabic 35-43, Eng. 31-7.

(10) Cf. G.S. van Krieken, *Khayr al-Din et la Tunisie (1850-1881)*, Leiden, 1976, pp. 106-45, 166-272.

Résumé

Dans l'histoire du Maghreb musulman, l'attitude des religieux envers l'exercice du pouvoir politique peut se décrire selon quatre catégories idéales qui typifient une gamme de positions qui vont de la renonciation absolue à l'acceptation totale de la tâche de gouvernement. A l'époque moderne ces attitudes sont rendues plus équivoques par la disparition des formes traditionnelles du gouvernement, remplacées par l'état moderne. En général les religieux ont accepté ce changement. Parmi les quatre catégories idéales, la personnalité du *murābiṭ*, prêt à prendre le pouvoir pour 'ordonner le bien et défendre le mal', s'incarne plutôt chez des militaires tels que Boumedienne et Qadhdhafi. Dans *Le Livre Vert*, Qadhdhafi rend le peuple responsable de l'interprétation de la Loi de l'Islam. Il se peut pourtant qu'il ait maintenant abandonné cette idée et se considère plutôt comme seul interprète valable de la Loi, revêtant ainsi, comme chef du gouvernement, le rôle politique du *mahdī*.

Summary

In the history of the Muslim Maghrib, the attitude of the men of religion to the exercise of political power may be explained in terms of four ideal types, *muftī*, *murābiṭ*, *marabout* and *mahdī*, which represent a range of positions from complete renunciation to complete acceptance of the duties of the ruler. In modern times the attitude of the men of religion has been complicated by the disappearance of traditional forms of government, and their replacement by the modern state. On the whole the men of religion have not protested. Of the four ideal types the *murābiṭ*, willing to take power to 'command the right and prohibit the wrong', has been exemplified rather by soldiers, by Boumedienne and by Qadhdhafi. In *The Green Book*, Qadhdhafi attributes to the people the responsability for interpreting the Law of Islam. It may well be, however, that he has now abandoned this notion in favour of his own authority as leader of the nation to pronounce upon the subject, thus taking upon himself the political role of the final type, the *mahdī*.